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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a mini-modular program for the tenth grade. The program operates within a year-long course of study which covers all four of the language arts and groups students in classes heterogeneously so that skills and concepts can be taught to all students and special needs and interests handled as they arise and are identified. Required units include Oral Communications, Formal/Informal Voice in Writing, Short Story, "Lord of the Flies," and Individualized Paragraph Building and Writing Skills. The first four of these begin the year and are taught by the "home-base" teacher. At the conclusion of these units the first electives are offered: three electives in the language skill area, two writing electives, and novel and drama electives including a unit on science fiction. Electives are usually three weeks long with the student returning to the home-base teacher for conferences at the conclusion of the elective. A common period for teachers involved in planning, coordinating, and executing mini-mod electives is also arranged. At the end of each year electives are dropped or added depending upon student interest, current issues, and staff talent. (HOD)

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Modules of Mini-Electives

Callie Kingsbury

Every English teacher has heard of mini-courses or mini-electives. What then is different about modules of mini-courses? The mini-modular program is similar to the standard mini-course program in that it offers the student choices and involves the student in planning his curriculum. However those of us in the State College Area High School tenth grade program feel that our set-up eliminates many of the shortcomings of the mini-course: such as fragmentation, lack of scope and sequence and no overall supervision of each student's progress.

The program I am going to describe evolved as part of a team teaching situation but its features could be utilized by any two or more teachers with classes of the same grade level meeting at the same time.

Our program operates within a year-long course of study which covers all four of the language arts. When the tenth grade English team formed four years ago, one of the first changes we made was to eliminate the tracked classes. We felt that the assignment to A, B, C tracks stigmatized students and made no provision for different rates of student maturation or for varying levels of ability in the language arts. As we all know, a fifteen year old may be silver-tongued in class discussions but unable to string together two complete or coherent sentences on paper. Therefore we decided to group students in classes heterogeneously. We believed that many skills and concepts could be successfully taught to all students and that special needs and interests could be best handled as they arose and were identified. Our handling of those needs and interests developed into the mini-modular elective.

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We feel that this arrangement utilizes the best of both worlds: the continuity of a year-long program and the variety and motivation of the mini-elective.

In planning the year's course of study, the team determined which curricular offerings could be taught to the heterogeneous class: those units which dealt with skills, concepts and processes to be developed throughout the year, in and out of mini-electives. These required units are Oral Communications, Formal/Informal Voice in Writing, Short Story, Lord of the Flies, and Individualized Paragraph Building and Writing Skills.

The first four of these begin the year and are taught by the "home base" teacher to a heterogeneous class. We begin with an analysis of oral communication and its elements (Sender, Receiver, Message, Channel, etc.) These will also be used in composition writing. As we do a great deal of small group discussion, decision-making and problem-solving throughout the year, we also include in this first unit exercises dealing with the group process and its dynamics.

The first composition unit deals, on a simplified level, with Walker-Gibson's formal/informal voice concept, which we find all students can handle and use to improve their writing.

The short story is the first literature unit. Through this unit we introduce concepts of literary analysis, reading skills such as building vocabulary from contextual clues, reading rate and comprehension by self-administered timing and comprehension exercises. We also work on essay-test taking throughout this unit.

These processes, skills and concepts are continued and further developed in the first novel of the year, Lord of the Flies. We find this an ideal novel for the heterogeneous class as it can be read on various levels.

At the conclusion of these units with the students introduced to the basics of reading, composition, speaking and listening, both teachers and students are ready for a break from each other. At this point we offer our first electives.

In the four years of mini-modular electives we have evolved a rationale for grouping these electives. We offer three electives in the language skill area: Language of Advertising, History of Language and Semantics. We have two writing electives: rhetoric and journalism. The genre options in the novel and drama are constructed to provide levels of interest and ability. A Tale of Two Cities is balanced with two shorter, simpler novels: The Pearl and Old Man and the Sea. The science fiction unit offers the challenging Childhood's End and the less demanding Alas, Babylon. The drama electives are Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra with Shakespeare's Julius Caesar for the academically talented, Acting Techniques for our budding Brandos and a selection of modern plays such as Witness for the Prosecution, Stalag 17 which serve to illustrate the genre to the student who is only mildly interested in drama - if at all.

Each year we add and drop electives, depending upon student interest, current issues, and staff talent. Several years ago we found the Language of Protest to be a popular option. Nowadays I doubt if there'd be enough interest in protest to form one class. This year we've added Acting Techniques

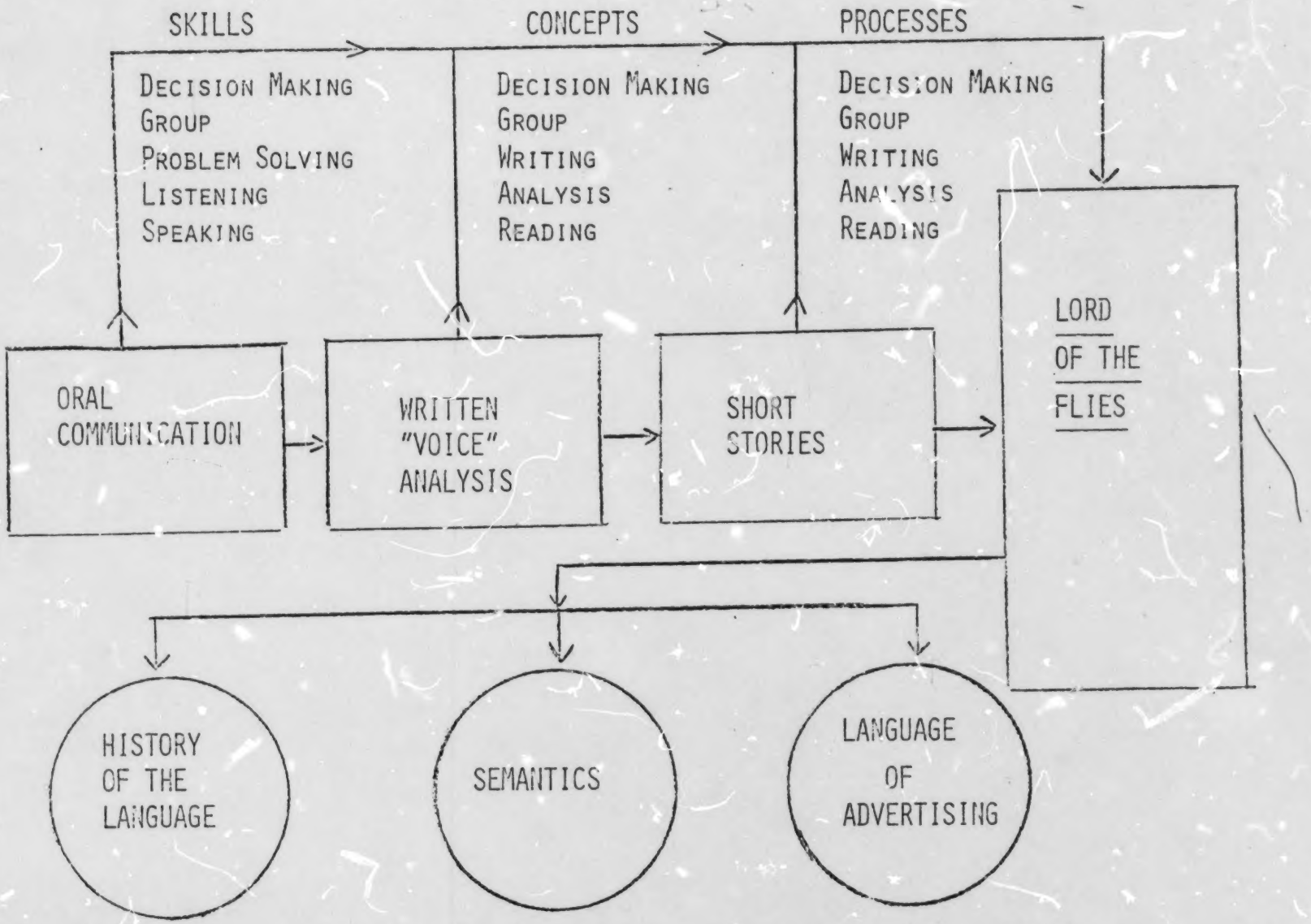
to our Drama mini-mods because we have a teacher on the team with a theatre arts background. One year we were able to offer an elective in Stagecraft because that was the forte of one of our student teachers, as was public speaking another year.

We've also found in four years that the electives should be at least three weeks long. Any shorter time causes too much confusion in making class lists and doesn't permit teacher and student to settle in and become acquainted with each other and the content of the elective mini-mods. We've found it a "must" to have students return to their home-base teacher for conferences. These conferences provide sequence and continuity by giving the home-base teacher, who is most familiar with the student, an opportunity to evaluate and discuss with him his progress and needs. Prior to each conference the home-base teacher has received the grades, quizzes, compositions, etc. from each mini-mod teacher. The student is counselled as to future electives and is assigned individualized learning packets according to his demonstrated abilities and needs.

Another "must" is a common period for teachers involved in planning, coordinating and executing mini-mod electives. The mini-mod electives offered together must be coordinated so that they last the same length of time whether that be 15 days, 18 or 21. Not only is this common planning period necessary for the mechanics of the program, but also the teachers must learn each other's strengths, weaknesses, methodology in order to work together effectively.

Student's reaction has been most gratifying. In a questionnaire given to the sophomores, numbering 486, 444 indicated that they were in favor of the mini-modular set-up, 6 said they did not like it and 36 had no opinion.

Obviously such a unified program, capitalizing upon the knowledge, background and outlook of several teachers, cannot help but provide the student with a more varied, challenging and meaningful learning experience in the language arts.


SKILLS
CONCEPTS
PROCESSES
DECISION MAKING
GROUP
PROBLEM SOLVING
LISTENING
SPEAKING
DECISION MAKING
GROUP
WRITING
ANALYSIS
READING
DECISION MAKING
GROUP
WRITING
ANALYSIS
READING
ORAL COMMUNICATION
WRITTEN "VOICE" ANALYSIS
SHORT STORIES
LORD OF THE FLIES
HISTORY OF THE LANGUAGE
SEMANTICS
LANGUAGE OF ADVERTISING

REQUIRED UNITS

ORAL COMMUNICATION

FORMAL / INFORMAL VOICE WRITING

SHORT STORY

INDIVIDUALIZED PARAGRAPH BUILDING

WRITING SKILLS LAPS

- PUNCTUATION
- CAPITALIZATION
- FRAGMENTS, RUN-ONS
- COORDINATION, SUBORDINATION
- PARALLELISM

ELECTIVES

LANGUAGE ELECTIVES

- History of Language
- Advertising
- Semantics

SCIENCE FICTION ELECTIVES

- Alas Babylon + Short Stories
- Childhood's End + Short Stories

WRITING ELECTIVES

- Advanced Rhetoric
- Journalism

NOVEL ELECTIVES

- A Tale of Two Cities
- Old Man and The Sea / The Pearl

DRAMA ELECTIVES

- A Study of Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar
- Acting Techniques
- Reading Modern Plays